Tafsir Ibn Kathir

ذَلِكَ الْكِتَابُ لاَ رَيْبَ فِيهِ هُدًى لِّلْمُتَّقِينَ

This is the Book; in it is guidance sure, without doubt, to those who fear Allah

Al-A`la

Revealed in Makkah

The Virtues of Surat Al-A`la

This Surah was revealed in Makkah before the migration to Al-Madinah. The proof of this is what Al-Bukhari recorded from Al-Bara' bin `Azib, that he said,

> "The first people to come to us (in Al-Madinah) from the Companions of the Prophet were Mus`ab bin `Umayr and Ibn Umm Maktum, who taught us the Qur'an; then `Ammar, Bilal and Sa`d came. Then `Umar bin Al-Khattab came with a group of twenty people, after which the Prophet came. I have not seen the people of Al-Madinah happier with anything more than their happiness with his coming (to Al-Madinah). This was reached to such an extent that I saw the children and little ones saying, `This is the Messenger of Allah who has come.' Thus, he came, but he did not come until after I had already recited (i.e., learned how to recite).
>
> سَبِّحِ اسْمَ رَبِّكَ الاٌّعْلَى
>
> Glorify the Name of your Lord, the Most High. (87:1) as well as other Surahs similar to it.''

It has been confirmed in the Two Sahihs that the Messenger of Allah said to Mu`adh, Why didn't you recite,

سَبِّحِ اسْمَ رَبِّكَ الاٌّعْلَى

وَالشَّمْسِ وَضُحَـهَا

وَالَّيْلِ إِذَا يَغْشَى

- Glorify the Name of your Lord, the Most High, (Surah 87);

- By the sun and its brightness, (Surah 91);

- By the night when it envelopes. (Surah 92);

Imam Ahmad recorded from An-Nu`man bin Bashir that the Messenger of Allah recited

سَبِّحِ اسْمَ رَبِّكَ الاٌّعْلَى

هَلْ أَتَاكَ حَدِيثُ الْغَـشِيَةِ

Al-A`la** (Surah 87) and **Al-Ghashiyh** (Surah 88) in the two **`Id prayers. If the `Id prayer fell on Friday, he would recite them in both prayers **(`Id and Salat Al-Jumu`ah)**.

Muslim also recorded this in his Sahih, as well as Abu Dawud, At-Tirmidhi, An-Nasa'i and Ibn Majah.

The wording of Muslim and the Sunan compilers says, "He used to recite

سَبِّحِ اسْمَ رَبِّكَ الاٌّعْلَى

هَلْ أَتَاكَ حَدِيثُ الْغَـشِيَةِ

Al-A`la** (Surah 87) and **Al-Ghashiyh** (Surah 88) for the two `Ids and Jumu`ah**. If they occurred on the same day, he would recite them in both of them.''

In his Musnad, Imam Ahmad recorded on the authority of Ubayy bin Ka`b, Abdullah bin `Abbas, `Abdur-Rahman bin Abza, and the Mother of the believers, A'ishah, that the Messenger of Allah used to recite

سَبِّحِ اسْمَ رَبِّكَ الاٌّعْلَى

قُلْ يأَيُّهَا الْكَـفِرُونَ

قُلْ هُوَ اللَّهُ أَحَدٌ

- Glorify the Name of your Lord, the Most High. and

- Say: `O you who disbelieve.' (Surah 109) and

- Say: `He is Allah, the One.' (Surah 112)

A'ishah added in her version that he would also recite the **Mu`awwidhatayn (Al-Falaq and An-Nas)**.

Al-A`la

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَـنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the Name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful.

سَبِّحِ اسْمَ رَبِّكَ الاٌّعْلَى

87:1 Glorify the Name of your Lord, the Most High.

الَّذِى خَلَقَ فَسَوَّى

87:2 Who has created, and then proportioned it.

وَالَّذِى قَدَّرَ فَهَدَى

87:3 And Who has measured; and then guided.

وَالَّذِى أَخْرَجَ الْمَرْعَى

87:4 And Who brings out the pasturage,

فَجَعَلَهُ غُثَآءً أَحْوَى

87:5 And then makes it dark stubble.

سَنُقْرِئُكَ فَلاَ تَنسَى

87:6 We shall make you recite, so you shall not forget,

إِلاَّ مَا شَآءَ اللَّهُ إِنَّهُ يَعْلَمُ الْجَهْرَ وَمَا يَخْفَى

87:7 Except what Allah may will He knows what is apparent and what is hidden.

وَنُيَسِّرُكَ لِلْيُسْرَى

87:8 And We shall make easy for you the easy.

فَذَكِّرْ إِن نَّفَعَتِ الذِّكْرَى

87:9 Therefore remind in case the reminder profits.

سَيَذَّكَّرُ مَن يَخْشَى

87:10 The reminder will be received by him who fears,

وَيَتَجَنَّبُهَا الاٌّشْقَى

87:11 But it will be avoided by the wretched,

الَّذِى يَصْلَى النَّارَ الْكُبْرَى

87:12 Who will enter the great Fire.

ثُمَّ لاَ يَمُوتُ فِيهَا وَلاَ يَحْيَا

87:13 There he will neither die nor live.

The Command to pronounce Tasbih and its Response

Imam Ahmad recorded from Ibn `Abbas that whenever the Messenger of Allah would recite

سَبِّحِ اسْمَ رَبِّكَ الْأَعْلَى (١)

Glorify the Name of your Lord, the Most High.

he would say, سُبْحَانَ رَبِّيَ الْأَعْلَى Glory to my Lord, the Most High.

Ibn Jarir recorded from Ibn Ishaq Al-Hamdani that whenever Ibn `Abbas would recite **سَبِّحِ اسْمَ رَبِّكَ الاٌّعْلَى** (Glorify the Name of your Lord, the Most High.) he would say,

"Glory to my Lord, the Most High,''

and whenever he would recite لاَ أُقسِمُ بِيَوْمِ الْقِيَـمَةِ (I swear by the Day of Resurrection.) and then reach the end of it أَلَيْسَ ذَلِكَ بِقَـدِرٍ عَلَى أَن يُحْيِىَ الْمَوْتَى (Is not He able to give life to the dead) (75:1,40) he would say,

"Glory to You, of course.''

Qatadah said,

"It has been mentioned to us that whenever the Prophet of Allah used to recite سَبِّحِ اسْمَ رَبِّكَ الاٌّعْلَى (Glorify the Name of your Lord, the Most High), he would say,

سُبْحَانَ رَبِّيَ الْأَعْلَى

Glory to my Lord, the Most High.''

The Creation, the Decree, and the Bringing Forth of Vegetation

Allah says,

الَّذِي خَلَقَ فَسَوَّى (٢)

Who has created, and then proportioned it.

meaning, He created that which has been created, and He fashioned every creation in the best of forms.

Then Allah says,

وَالَّذِي قَدَّرَ فَهَدَى (٣)

And Who has measured; and then guided.

Mujahid said,

"He guided man to distress and happiness, and he guided the cattle to their pastures.''

This Ayah is similar to what Allah has said about Musa's statement to Fir`awn,

رَبُّنَا الَّذِى أَعْطَى كُلَّ شَىءٍ خَلْقَهُ ثُمَّ هَدَى

Our Lord is He Who gave to each thing its form and nature, then guided it aright. (20:50)

meaning, He decreed a set measure and guided the creation to it.

This is just as is confirmed in Sahih Muslim on the authority of Abdullah bin `Amr that the Messenger of Allah said,

إِنَّ اللهَ قَدَّرَ مَقَادِيرَ الْخَلَائِقِ قَبْلَ أَنْ يَخْلُقَ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ بِخَمْسِينَ أَلْفَ سَنَةٍ وَكَانَ عَرْشُهُ عَلَى الْمَاءِ

Verily, Allah ordained the measure of all creation fifty thousand years before He created the heavens and the earth, and His Throne was over the water.

Concerning Allah's statement,

وَالَّذِي أَخْرَجَ الْمَرْعَى (٤)

And Who brings out the pasturage,

meaning, all types of vegetation and crops.

فَجَعَلَهُ غُثَاء أَحْوَى (٥)

And then makes it dark stubble.

Ibn `Abbas said, "Dried up and altered.''

It has been narrated that Mujahid, Qatadah and Ibn Zayd, all made similar statements.

The Prophet does not forget the Revelation

Allah says,

سَنُقْرِؤُكَ ...

We shall make you to recite,

meaning, `O Muhammad.'

... فَلَا تَنسَى (٦)

so you shall not forget (it),

This is Allah informing and promising him (the Prophet) that He will teach him a recitation that he will not forget.

إِلَّا مَا شَاء اللَّهُ...

Except what Allah may will.

Qatadah said,

"The Prophet did not forget anything except what Allah willed.''

It has been said that the meaning of Allah's statement, فَلاَ تَنسَى (so you shall not forget,) is,

"do not forget''

and that which would be abrogated, is merely an exception to this.

Meaning, `do not forget what We teach you to recite, except what Allah wills, which He removes and there is no sin on your leaving it off (not retaining it).'

Concerning Allah's statement,

... إِنَّهُ يَعْلَمُ الْجَهْرَ وَمَا يَخْفَى (٧)

He knows what is apparent and what is hidden.

meaning, He knows what the creatures do openly and what they hide, whether it be statements or deeds. None of that is hidden from Him.

Then Allah says,

وَنُيَسِّرُكَ لِلْيُسْرَى (٨)

And We shall make easy for you the easy.

meaning, `We will make good deeds and statements easy for you, and We will legislate such Law for you that is easy, tolerant, straight and just, with no crookedness, difficulty or hardship in it.'

The Command to remind

Allah then says,

فَذَكِّرْ إِن نَّفَعَتِ الذِّكْرَى (٩)

Therefore remind in case the reminder profits.

meaning, remind where reminding is beneficial.

From here we get the etiquette of spreading knowledge, that it should not be wasted upon those who are not suitable or worthy of it.

The Commander of the believers, `Ali said,

> "You do not tell people any statement that their intellects do not grasp except that it will be a **Fitnah** (trial) for some of them.''

He also said,

> "Tell people that which they know. Would you like for Allah and His Messenger to be rejected''

Allah said:

سَيَذَّكَّرُ مَن يَخْشَى (١٠)

The reminder will be received by him who fears,

meaning, `he whose heart fears Allah and who knows that he is going to meet Him, will receive admonition from what you convey to him, O Muhammad.'

وَيَتَجَنَّبُهَا الْأَشْقَى (١١)

الَّذِي يَصْلَى النَّارَ الْكُبْرَى (١٢)

ثُمَّ لَا يَمُوتُ فِيهَا وَلَا يَحْيَى (١٣)

But it will be avoided by the wretched,

who will enter the great Fire.

There he will neither die nor live.

> meaning, he will not die and thus be allowed to rest, nor will he live a life that is beneficial to him. Instead, his life will be harmful to him, because it will be the cause of his feeling of the pain of torment and various types of punishments what he is being punished with.

Imam Ahmad recorded from Abu Sa`id that the Messenger of Allah said,

أَمَّا أَهْلُ النَّارِ الَّذِينَ هُمْ أَهْلُهَا لَا يَمُوتُونَ وَلَا يَحْيَوْنَ،

وَأَمَّا أُنَاسٌ يُرِيدُ اللهُ بِهِمُ الرَّحْمَةَ فَيُمِيتُهُمْ فِي النَّارِ فَيَدْخُلُ عَلَيْهِمُ الشُّفَعَاءُ فَيَأْخُذُ الرَّجُلُ الضِّبَارَةَ فَيُنْبِتُهُمْ أو قال: يَنْبُتُونَ فِي نَهْرِ الْحيَا، أو قال: الْحيَاةِ، أو قال: الْحيَوَانِ أو قال: نَهْرِ الْجَنَّةِ فَيَنْبُتُونَ نَبَاتَ الْحِبَّةِ فِي حَمِيلِ السَّيْلِ

Concerning the people of the Fire who are deserving of it, they will not die nor will they live.

Regarding the people that Allah wants mercy for, He will cause them to die in the Fire. Then He will allow the intercessors to come to them, and a man will take his groups of supporters and plant them (or he said (they will be planted) in the River of **Al-Haya** (or he said (**Al-Hayah**, or **Al-Hayawan**, or **Nahr Al-Jannah**). Then they will sprout up like the sprouting of the seed on the moist bank of a flowing stream.)

Then the Prophet said,

أَمَا تَرَوْنَ الشَّجَرَةَ تَكُونُ خَضْرَاءَ، ثُمَّ تَكُونُ صَفْرَاءَ، ثُمَّ تَكُونُ خَضْرَاءَ؟

Haven't you all seen the tree that is green, then it turns yellow, then it turns green (again)?

Abu Sa`id then said that some of those present said,

"It is as if the Prophet used to live in the desert wilderness (i.e., due to his parables of nature).''

Ahmad also recorded from Abu Sa`id that the Messenger of Allah said,

أَمَّا أَهْلُ النَّارِ الَّذِينَ هُمْ أَهْلُهَا فَإِنَّهُمْ لَا يَمُوتُونَ فِيهَا وَلَا يَحْيَوْنَ،

وَلَـكِنْ أُنَاسٌ أو كما قال تُصِيبُهُمُ النَّارُ بِذُنُوبِهِمْ أو قال: بِخَطَايَاهُمْ فَيُمِيتُهُمْ إِمَاتَةً حَتَّى إِذَا صَارُوا فَحْمًا أُذِنَ فِي الشَّفَاعَةِ، فَجِيءَ بِهِمْ ضَبَائِرَ ضَبَائِرَ فَبُثُّوا عَلَى أَنْهَارِ الْجَنَّةِ فَيُقَالُ:

يَا أَهْلَ الْجَنَّةِ أَفِيضُوا عَلَيْهِمْ،

فَيَنْبُتُونَ نَبَاتَ الْحِبَّةِ تَكُونُ فِي حَمِيلِ السَّيْلِ

Concerning the people of the Fire who will be dwellers of it, they will not die in it nor will they live.

However, there will be a group of people - or as he said -(whom the Fire will burn due to their sins - or he said - (their wrongdoings. So, He will cause them to die until they become burnt coal. Then the intercession will be allowed and they will be brought group after group, and they will be scattered over the rivers of Paradise. Then it will be said:

"O people of Paradise! Pour down upon them.''

Then they will sprout like the growing of the seed that is upon the moist bank of the flowing stream.''

Then, a man from among the people present said,

"It is as if the Messenger of Allah used to live in the desert wilderness.''

Muslim also recorded this Hadith.

قَدْ أَفْلَحَ مَن تَزَكَّى

87:14 Indeed whosoever purifies himself shall achieve success.

وَذَكَرَ اسْمَ رَبِّهِ فَصَلَّى

87:15 And remembers the Name of his Lord, and performs Salah.

بَلْ تُؤْثِرُونَ الْحَيَوةَ الدُّنْيَا

87:16 Rather you prefer the life of this world.

وَالاٌّخِرَةُ خَيْرٌ وَأَبْقَى

87:17 Although the Hereafter is better and more lasting.

إِنَّ هَـذَا لَفِى الصُّحُفِ الاٍّولَى

87:18 Verily, this is in the former Scriptures

صُحُفِ إِبْرَهِيمَ وَمُوسَى

87:19 The Scriptures of Ibrahim and Musa.

A Statement concerning the People of Success

Allah says,

قَدْ أَفْلَحَ مَن تَزَكَّى (١٤)

Indeed whosoever purifies himself shall achieve success.

meaning, he purifies himself from despised characteristics and he follows what Allah has revealed to the Messenger.

وَذَكَرَ اسْمَ رَبِّهِ فَصَلَّى (١٥)

And remembers the Name of his Lord, and performs **Salah**.

meaning, he establishes the prayer in its appointed time, seeking the pleasure of Allah, obedience to His command, and implementation of His Law.

We have already reported from the Commander of the believers, `Umar bin `Abdul-`Aziz, that he used to command the people to give the **Sadaqat Al-Fitr**, and he would recite this Ayah:

قَدْ أَفْلَحَ مَن تَزَكَّى

وَذَكَرَ اسْمَ رَبِّهِ فَصَلَّى

Indeed whosoever purifies himself shall achieve success. And remembers the Name of his Lord, and performs Salah.

Abu Al-Ahwas said,

"If someone comes to any of you begging, and he wants to pray, then he should give charity

(Zakah) before he prays. For verily, Allah the Exalted says,

قَدْ أَفْلَحَ مَن تَزَكَّى
وَذَكَرَ اسْمَ رَبِّهِ فَصَلَّى

Indeed whosoever purifies himself shall achieve success. And remembers the Name of his Lord, and performs **Salah**.''

Qatadah said concerning this Ayah,

قَدْ أَفْلَحَ مَن تَزَكَّى
وَذَكَرَ اسْمَ رَبِّهِ فَصَلَّى

Indeed whosoever purifies himself shall achieve success. And remembers the Name of his Lord, and performs **Salah (Fasalla)**.)

"He purifies his wealth and pleases his Creator.''

This World is Worthless in Comparison to the Hereafter

Then Allah says,

بَلْ تُؤْثِرُونَ الْحَيَاةَ الدُّنْيَا (١٦)

Rather you prefer the life of this world.

meaning, `you give it precedence over the matter of the Hereafter, and you prefer it because of what it contains of usefulness and benefit for you in livelihood, and your returns (i.e., income, profitable gain).'

وَالْآخِرَةُ خَيْرٌ وَأَبْقَى (١٧)

Although the Hereafter is better and more lasting.

meaning, the reward of the final abode is better than the worldly life, and it is more lasting.

For indeed, this worldly life is lowly and temporal, whereas the Hereafter is noble and eternal. Thus, how can an intelligent person prefer that which is short-lived over that which is eternal. How can he give importance to that which will soon pass away

from him, while ignoring the importance of the abode of eternity and infinity.

Imam Ahmad recorded from Abu Musa Al-Ash`ari that the Messenger of Allah said,

مَنْ أَحَبَّ دُنْيَاهُ أَضَرَّ بِآخِرَتِهِ، وَمَنْ أَحَبَّ آخِرَتَهُ أَضَرَّ بِدُنْيَاهُ، فَآثِرُوا مَا يَبْقَى عَلَى مَا يَفْنَى

Whoever loves his worldly life, will suffer in his Hereafter, and whoever loves his Hereafter, will suffer in his worldly life. Therefore, chose that which is everlasting over that which is temporal.

Ahmad was alone in recording this Hadith.

The Scriptures of Ibrahim and Musa

Allah then says,

إِنَّ هَذَا لَفِي الصُّحُفِ الْأُولَى (١٨)

صُحُفِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَمُوسَى (١٩)

Verily, this is in the former Scriptures -- the Scriptures of Ibrahim and Musa.

This Ayah is similar to Allah's statement in Surat An-Najm,

أَمْ لَمْ يُنَبَّأْ بِمَا فِى صُحُفِ مُوسَى

وَإِبْرَٰهِيمَ الَّذِى وَفَّى

أَلاَّ تَزِرُ وَزِرَةٌ وِزْرَ أُخْرَى

وَأَن لَّيْسَ لِلإِنسَـٰنِ إِلاَّ مَا سَعَى

وَأَنَّ سَعْيَهُ سَوْفَ يُرَى

ثُمَّ يُجْزَاهُ الْجَزَآءَ الأَوْفَى

وَأَنَّ إِلَى رَبِّكَ الْمُنتَهَى

Or is he not informed with what is in the Scriptures of Musa. And of Ibrahim who fulfilled (or conveyed) all that (Allah ordered him to do or convey):

that no burdened person (with sins) shall bear the burden (sins) of another.

And that man can have nothing but what he does.

And that his deeds will be seen. Then he will be recompensed with a full and the best recompense.

And that to your Lord is the End (Return of everything).) (53:36-42)

And so forth, until the end of these Ayat.

Abu `Aliyah said, "The story of this Surah is in the earlier Scriptures.''

Ibn Jarir preferred the view that the meaning of Allah's statement, إِنَّ هَـٰذَآ (Verily, this) is referring to His previous statement,

قَدْ أَفْلَحَ مَن تَزَكَّى

وَذَكَرَ اسْمَ رَبِّهِ فَصَلَّى

بَلْ تُؤْثِرُونَ الْحَيَوةَ الدُّنْيَا

وَالاٌّخِرَةُ خَيْرٌ وَأَبْقَى

Indeed whosoever purifies himself shall achieve success.

And remembers the Name of his Lord, and offers Salah.

Rather you prefer the life of this world.

Although the Hereafter is better and more lasting.

Then Allah says,

إِنَّ هَـٰذَآ

Verily, this

meaning, the content of this discussion,

إِنَّ هَـذَا لَفِى الصُّحُفِ الاٍّولَى

صُحُفِ إِبْرَهِيمَ وَمُوسَى

in the former Scriptures, the Scriptures of Ibrahim and Musa.

This view that he (At-Tabari) has chosen is good and strong.

Similar to it has been reported from Qatadah and Ibn Zayd. And Allah knows best.

This is the end of the Tafsir of Surah **Al-A`la**. All praise and blessings are due to Allah, and He is the Giver of success and protection from error.